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Purchase and Post-Purchase Intentions of Ethical Consumer Behavior

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Introduction. Two main streams of ethical consumer behavior are ethical consumerism and consumer ethics. While ethical consumerism is defined as consumers' decisions and behaviors to satisfy personal needs considering the results of their decisions with regard to environment and society (Ozkan, 2009), consumer ethics focuses on consumers' rightness of certain actions as a buyer during the purchase and post-purchase process (Dodge, Edwards, & Fullerton, 1996). Within the field of apparel shopping, ethical consumers are those who not only purchase socially responsible apparel but also complete their purchase process without return frauds (Rosenbaum, Kuntze, & Wooldridge, 2011). The purpose of this study is to explore the antecedents of ethical consumer behavior: socially responsible apparel (i.e., eco, organic, recycled, fair-trade, and sweat-free apparel) purchasing intention and post-purchase ethical returning intention.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development. The hierarchical relationship among values, attitudes, and intentions (Dabholkar & Bagozzi, 2002) is adopted as the theoretical framework for this study. As individuals' abstract beliefs, values are eventually turned into certain forms of personal traits (Smith, 1982), which play a central role in assessing problems or situations to behave in a certain way. For the purpose of the study, trait was referenced instead of value. The study included altruism, ethical concerns, and ethical obligation as personal ethical traits. As a central part in consumer decision-making, attitudes tend to be consistent and are turned into certain forms of behavior. Consumers who have positive attitudes social responsibility are also likely to avoid unethical returning practices because they are less likely to possess Machiavellian personalities. Consumers who have Machiavellian personalities are known to do whatever they need without considering how their actions impact other people which may lead them to engage in unethical clothing returning behavior.

H1: Ethical traits, a) altruism, b) ethical concerns, and c) ethical obligation, will have a direct, positive effect on attitudes toward social responsibility in the apparel and textiles industry.

H2: Attitudes toward social responsibility in the apparel and textiles industry will have a direct, positive effect on purchase intention of socially responsible apparel products.

H3: Attitudes toward social responsibility in the apparel and textiles industry will have a direct, positive effect on ethical post-purchase returning intention.

Method. Data were collected through a store intercept survey method from 302 consumers ($M = 25.8$ years, 60 % female and 40% male). The survey consisted of five sections to measure: 1) ethical traits (i.e., altruism, ethical concerns, and ethical obligation), 2) attitudes toward social responsibility in the apparel and textiles industry, 3) behavioral intentions to purchase socially responsible apparel and to return products ethically, 4) social desirability bias, and 5) demographics. Factor analyses results showed that all multi-item scales have acceptable reliabilities ranging from .76 to .92. All constructs emerged as one factor except for ethical

concerns (Factor 1 = concern for environment and Factor 2 = concern for production) and ethical obligation (Factor 1 = personal contribution and Factor 2 = self obligation).

Findings. Single and multiple regressions were conducted to test the hypotheses. Results showed that all three ethical traits predicted consumers' positive attitudes toward socially responsible business practices in the apparel and textiles industry at the significant level of $p < .001$:

altruism, $R = .29$, $R^2 = .08$, $F(1, 283) = 26.59$, $p < .001$; ethical concerns (concern for environment: $p < .001$; concern for production: $p < .001$), $R = .53$, $R^2 = .28$, $F(3, 273) = 37.36$, $p < .001$; and ethical obligation (personal contribution: $p < .001$; self obligation: $p < .001$), $R = .50$, $R^2 = .26$; $F(2, 287) = 46.72$. In turn, attitudes toward social responsibility positively predicted consumers' intention to purchase socially responsible apparel products and to engage in ethical returning behavior: $R = .68$, $R^2 = .46$; $F(1, 285) = 242.71$, $p < .001$ and $R = .18$, $R^2 = .03$; $F(1, 290) = 9.88$, $p < .01$ respectively. Thus, all hypotheses were supported.

Conclusions and Implications. The three components of ethical traits influenced consumers' socially responsible attitudes. That is, consumers who were altruistic, concerned about the environment and society, and felt responsibility toward the world expressed their positive attitudes toward socially responsible business practices. Among the ethical traits, concerns about the environment were the greatest predictor of socially responsible attitudes. These attitudes in turn played an important role in explaining socially responsible apparel purchasing intention and ethical returning intention. This meant that consumers who concerned themselves with ethical business practices of apparel companies as the main factor to support businesses were more likely to purchase apparel products that have less impact on the environment and people who work for apparel manufacturing factories. Socially responsible attitudes were also revealed to be influential in predicting ethical returning intention. This study expanded the theory of the value-attitude-behavior hierarchy by incorporating both socially responsible (or ethical) purchase and post-purchase intentions. It also provided more information regarding psychographic profiles of socially responsible consumers by investigating the antecedents of ethical consumer behavior. This information may be useful to segment a specific market of consumers interested in purchasing socially responsible apparel and to develop return policies of the market.

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